



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Caltrans Celebrates its 120th Anniversary: Bicyclists to Thank for Helping Make Highway System a Reality

SACRAMENTO – You may know that Caltrans is celebrating its 120th anniversary. But did you know that the pressure to create a state highway system came not from automobile manufacturers or drivers, but instead from bicycle enthusiasts and manufacturers in the 1800s?

The most common way to travel in the late 19th century—other than train—was horse, wagon, coach, foot—or the craze at that time—the bicycle. Bikes were so popular that by 1890, more than one million bicycles were being built each year, but roads, especially those that connected cities and towns, were in poor condition.

“Cycling enthusiasts initiated the push for a connected highway system, and even in 1895, with the many ways people traveled, we were well on our way to a multimodal highway system,” said Caltrans Director Malcolm Dougherty.

The League of American Wheelmen, now known as the League of American Bicyclists, formed in 1880, and at one point in the 19th century had more than 100,000 members. They were at the forefront of the Good Roads Movement—a movement at the local, state, and federal levels to improve the nation’s poorly maintained roads—roads shared with horsemen, wagon drivers and pedestrians and that often created safety issues for the diverse travelers.

Caltrans’ history begins in 1895 when the California Legislature created the Bureau of Highways, consisting of three commissioners, R.C. Irvine, Marsden Manson and J.L. Maude, who were tasked with studying highway needs and recommending a state highway system.

Irvine, Manson and Maude set out on a buckboard in 1895 and spent that year and part of the next traveling to every county in California. In Nov. 1896, they submitted their 1895-1896 biennial report to Gov. James H. Budd, stating, “the roads of California are in a deplorable condition. The absolutely systemless manner in which the majority of the roads in the State have been located and constructed, and are being maintained, as well as the extensive unnecessary mileage, are evident to anyone who has traveled over the State.”

The commissioners further reported, “The influence of the bicycle on agitation for improved highways cannot be overestimated. Millions of dollars have been invested in the manufacture of these easy and graceful machines of locomotion, and this agitation for better roads is due more directly to the efforts of the wheelman than to any other one cause. . . Every wheelman is a preacher of the gospel of good roads.”

Around the turn of the 20th century, automobiles became increasingly popular, paving the way for the highway system as we know it today, and as California and motorized transportation

evolved, so has the state's transportation system, helping make California the world's 8th largest economy.

The state highway system now boasts more than 50,000 highway lane miles and more 13,000 state-owned bridges. It has about 32 million registered vehicles traveling nearly 90 billion vehicle miles each year.

The state's transportation system has also seen many firsts. The Bill Keene Memorial Interchange in Los Angeles was the world's first stack interchange. When it opened, the Yerba Buena Island bore of the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge was the largest transportation bore in the world. Botts dots, the reflective bumps that separate highway lanes? We have Caltrans inventors to thank for those. California has also been recognized as a leader in seismic design, and the self-anchored suspension span of the San Francisco–Oakland is the largest in the world.

"We've made it our mission to provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability," said Dougherty. "It's a system that now includes automobiles, trains, bikes, pedestrians, airplanes and mass transit, and as technology improves and the way we travel changes, Caltrans will change with it."

To celebrate its 120-year anniversary, Caltrans will post historical facts on social media throughout 2015. During the 120th anniversary week, there also will be displays in the Caltrans Headquarters lobby and cafeteria and the department's website, www.dot.ca.gov, and a News Flash video at <https://youtu.be/n40hRPyQG00>.

Fast-forward 120 Years

What started in 1895 as the Bureau of Highways, with just three commissioners, has grown into today's Caltrans with about 20,000 employees across the state.

California's population in 1895 was about 1.5 million, and now, nearly 25 times as many people—almost 40 million—call California home.

The three Bureau of Highway commissioners recommended a 4,500-mile state highway system. That system now has more than 15,000 miles of highway that contain more than 50,000 lane miles connecting all parts of the state.

When the Bureau of Highways was created, automobiles were virtually unknown in California, but now, there are more than 30 million registered vehicles in the state.

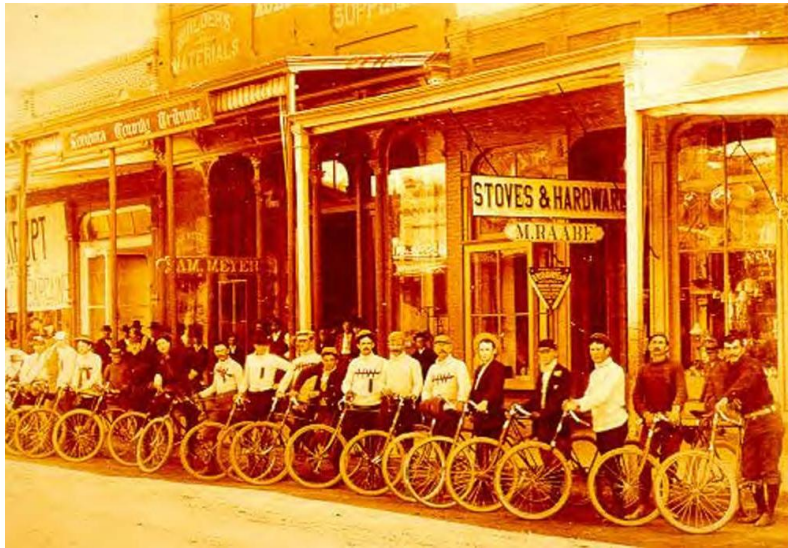
In 1900, an elevated cycleway, a little over a mile long, opened in Pasadena with plans to extend it to Los Angeles. With the arrival of the automobile, the project was abandoned, and the cycleway's area later became the Arroyo Seco Parkway—California's first freeway—and the oldest freeway in the West.

Important events in Caltrans' history: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/paffairs/about/cthist.htm>

Caltrans library and history center online: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/esc/CHPC/historylinks.html>

The Federal Highway Administration's history of the nation's highway system: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/93fall/p93au1.cfm>

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This photo shows the Healdsburg Wheelmen with their bicycles on West Street on a run to Skaggs Springs in 1895. *Photo courtesy, the Sonoma County Library.*



The Bureau of Highways: R.C. Irvine in buckboard, J.L. Maude with camera, and Maje, Mr. Irvine's Gordon setter. Picture taken in Riverside County in 1896. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*



Automobile travelers on a California road in May 1910. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*

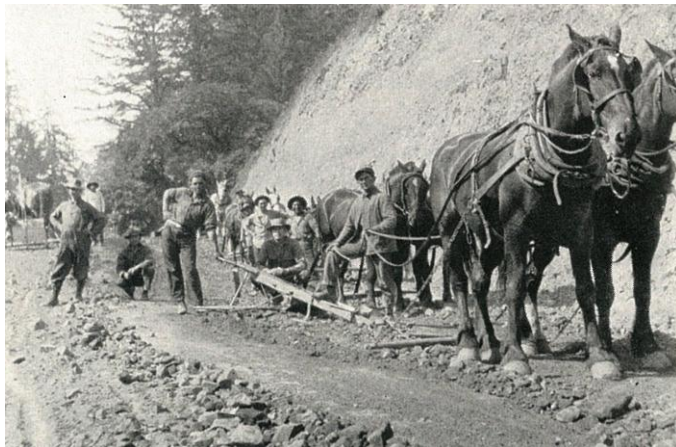


This 1911 photo shows a survey party with buggy and mule team. They were surveying for what would become the state's first highway contract. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*

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This undated photo shows an unpaved part of the state highway system in Colusa County. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*



In 1915, the “Convict Labor Law” was enacted, authorizing the state to use convict labor for highway construction. Inmates worked with hand labor methods to build highways in mountainous areas, as shown in this photo of teams, plows, and Fresno scrapers working along the Smith River in Del Norte County in 1923. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*



Governor Culbert L. Olson's car leads the long procession to the site of the official opening ceremonies for the California's first freeway, the Arroyo-Seco Parkway. The Parkway was dedicated on December 30, 1940, and marked the beginning of the freeway era in the Golden State. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*



This March 1940 shows workers clearing rock in Sacramento and El Dorado Counties for U.S. Highway 50 between Folsom and Placerville. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*

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This 2009 photo shows the U.S. Highway 101 and State Route 110 interchange in Los Angeles. It was the world's first stack interchange. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*



This 2012 picture shows the Amtrak California Capitol Corridor—one of the three Caltrans-supported intercity passenger rail lines. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*



Current-day cyclists ride between the lines of a new bike lane that is part of a “complete street” project that turned California Street in downtown Redding into a thoroughfare for all, accommodating motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. *Photo courtesy of Caltrans.*

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